

Written Testimony For David Matsuura
Hawaii - Hearing

Thank you for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee today. My name is David Matsuura and I am manager of Umikoa Ranch. I'd like to talk to you today a little about my experiences with these programs and – through my experience as a rancher, forester, and former State Senator - what I see as the opportunities to use them more broadly and effectively in Hawaii.

At Umikoa Ranch, we pride ourselves on being good stewards of the land. For example, we have established the first Safe Harbor Agreement/WRP project in the nation. We created 4 wetlands and replanted surrounding uplands with native fruit bearing plants, to benefit threatened and endangered species, like the nene (Hawaiian goose) and the koloa (the Hawaiian duck). I am proud to report that koloa duck have been using and breeding in these wetlands and have seen a 200% increase in population per year.

We have also had success restoring native forest on my ranch. We used heavy equipment to scarify upper elevation degraded pasture and have seen a great resurgence in koa re-growth from the natural seed bank that lay beneath the pasture grass. This work was supported by USDA and the State of Hawaii's assistance and today the upper reaches of Umikoa Ranch are dense with young koa forest that supports native birds and other animals. This could help us branch out into some private forestry to supplement our ranching operation.

I know, from this personal experience, that working with voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs can fit in with running a working ranch and can give us a way to help address Hawaii's important conservation problems on private lands. I support the CREP and Coordinated Conservation Plan because I believe that these proposals are a great way to address some of Hawaii's biggest resource needs and to make the farm bill conservation programs work better in Hawaii.

We have a wonderful slice of paradise here in Hawaii, but it's important to understand that we also have some big environmental challenges. We're the threatened and endangered species capitol of the U.S. and the invasive species capitol. An ancient Hawaiian proverb says: "Hahai no ka ua i ka ulula'au" (rains always follow the forest). In many places, we've lost important forest cover in high elevations and in aquifer recharge areas.

There are also enormous challenges facing agriculture in Hawaii. How can we diversify our incomes and move from one to multi-product operations that have more stable revenue? How do we protect agricultural landscapes when land prices make development increasingly hard to resist? How do we expand and maintain the niches for Hawaii specialty crops like macademia nut, coffee, chocolate and tropical fruits? How do we continue commercially viable ranching operations with volatile beef pricing, escalating land and operational costs and a climate of economic and regulatory uncertainty.

In my experience, I've seen that farm bill conservation programs could help us address important environmental issues in Hawaii. Unfortunately, many of the producers who own the most environmentally significant land – *my ranch included?* - can't participate in farm bill programs because of the adjusted gross income provision of the 2002 farm bill, and rules that are very difficult to adhere to given land conditions. Many are ranchers and farmers who own coastal lands some of which they've leased or sold for development. Other states may have an AGI issue, but in Hawaii, our land values and historic landownership patterns make it basically impossible to really address environmental issues on private lands without an exemption from the AGI. To be effective, the Hawaii CREP and Coordinated Conservation Plans must include a waiver of the AGI. I also believe Hawaii should be allowed to either have a waiver or the ability to adjust the regulations and qualifications of the farm bill programs to fit the land and the purpose of the program. Given the topography and environmental conditions of our lands many of the farm bill programs can not be applied here.

Finally, I think the CREP and Coordinated Conservation Plans would be an enormous win/win for Hawaii. I think these proposals would restore buffers, wetlands and forest in critical places. This would decrease erosion and polluted runoff, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater and help stabilize the flow of fresh water to our streams. Restoring buffers, wetlands and buffers would also bring back more aquatic life in our streams and would benefit coral reefs. Native wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, would benefit from this habitat restoration and from invasive species control. The CREP and Coordinated Conservation Plan would benefit Hawaiian ranchers and farmers by giving us a way to participate. We haven't gotten much from these programs in the past because our circumstances are so different here than they are on the mainland. These proposals offer a way to participate in programs that are geared to address some of our most pressing environmental issues.

Thank you for your interest and I welcome any questions you have.